

Dawa Tarchin Phillips
The Three Principles of Awakening
Week One: “View: Seeing Things As They Are”
April 4, 2020



Hello, I am Dawa Tarchin Phillips. I am a Vajrayana teacher, trained in the Kagyu and Nyingma lineages, and a Buddhist lama. I have been practicing buddhadharma for nearly thirty years and have completed two traditional three-year meditation retreats. I am also a mindfulness and meditation researcher. And I am the resident teacher of the Santa Barbara Bodhi Path Buddhist Center.

In Vajrayana Buddhism, view, meditation, and action comprise the training of the path of enlightenment. In this series, I'm going to break down how these three principles build upon each other to give rise to and stabilize a direct realization of emptiness, or the nature of the mind.

Let me first start by summarizing what we mean when we talk about view, meditation, and action, because there are two elements to these teachings: a relative aspect and an absolute aspect.

The relative aspect of view refers to how we look at life, including ourselves, others, and the world. In the absolute sense, the view is our ability to see things *as they are*. We can see the true state of being, the ground or the groundlessness of true, absolute being.

In the relative sense, meditation refers to developing the capacity to focus, to pay attention, and to have awareness on a moment-by-moment basis. But in the absolute sense, meditation is about *stabilizing* the view. It's about being able to rest in the view on a moment-by-moment basis; to see the true, absolute state of reality.

In the relative sense, action refers to exactly what we might think it refers to: how we engage, or how we behave, and the actions we perform on a day-to-day basis. But in the absolute sense, action refers to our ability to integrate the view in all aspects of our lives.

For today's talk, we're going to focus on view. But before we get into the topic, I want to invite you to connect to your motivation. I invite you to give rise to the motivation that what you'll hear here today is not only going to benefit you, but it is also going to make you more capable to benefit those around you.

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Traditionally, people have used view, meditation, and action to differentiate teachings and teachers. A student would visit different teachers and ask, "What are your view, meditation, and action?" As they would learn to appreciate that particular teacher's view, meditation, and action, they would begin to see the nuances and the differences in the teachings that were being offered. Thus, they could identify a view, meditation, and action that seemed the best for them, one that seemed to have the best use for where they wanted to go, because view, meditation, and action is what leads to the result of the path. So, that was traditionally a way that students could discern what kind of results they would get if they followed this or that particular teacher.

There are many different kinds of views in the world. Some of those views are mundane and some of them are supermundane. We differentiate them based on their goal. If a view is aimed at our life—our present life and the way that it unfolds—we call that a mundane view. If a view is aimed at liberation—at awakening or the state of enlightenment—we call that a supermundane view.

Let me explain the distinction between mundane and supermundane views a little bit more. In this life, most of us are primarily occupied with avoiding suffering and achieving wanted or desirable results. We are preoccupied with what are called the eight worldly dharmas, or the eight worldly concerns. These are joy and pain, praise and blame, fame and shame, and loss and gain. They encompass all that we hope to achieve and all that we hope to avoid. When we look at life through the lens of the eight worldly dharmas, we identify, label, and judge some experiences, people, and situations as desirable, and other experiences, people, and situations as undesirable. We are constantly torn between the desirable and the undesirable.

When we look at the supermundane views—the views that lead to liberation and awakening—we see they have to do with the nature of reality. Now, the nature of reality refers to two things. One, it refers to the nature of the experiencer, or the perceiver, the nature of the person that is observing reality. Two, it refers to the nature of awareness, and the nature of that which is perceived; the nature of all the phenomena, all objects of perception. By cultivating a more accurate understanding of the nature of the perceived and the perceiver, we're able to emancipate our view until we have an understanding of reality that can lead to liberation.

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In the buddhadharma, we consider four different views to be supermundane, or views that lead to liberation or awakening. The first of these is the Vaibhashika, the view that everything in the world can be divided into the smallest possible indivisible particles, and these small indivisible particles exist in small indivisible moments. Therefore, reality consists of indivisible particles existing in indivisible moments, and everything else is just relative perception.

The next view is the Sautrantika view. It asserts that these indivisible particles and moments of time aren't directly perceivable, because perception is a time-lapse process. This means that there is always a lapse of time between what occurs and the moment that we perceive it. We know from neuroscience and perception science that there is a time-lapse between the moment that light reaches the retina and when it is processed by the brain, for example. So, it is easy to understand why the Sautrantika developed this view that the smallest indivisible particles and moments of time aren't perceivable directly, but can only be inferred.

The Chittamatra view differs a little bit from the Vaibhashika and the Sautrantika views in that it doesn't believe that there are such things as indivisible moments of time or indivisible subatomic particles, but that everything amounts to experience and that that experience is grounded in mind. This view teaches that the mind is the only thing that actually exists, and the mind is experiencing moment-by-moment phenomena. Whether or not those phenomena belong to the sense of self or to the world that we perceive around ourselves, everything just amounts to experience. So the Chittamatra School, which is considered the Mind-Only School, believes that everything is just the experience of mind.

The fourth school is the Madhyamika School, and it asserts that not even the mind is real. Even the mind, which is the ground of all experiences—everything that we consider ourselves, everything that we consider others, everything that we consider the material world—boils down to an illusory experience, because of the perceiving mind, the mind which is aware of everything, can't be established. So, if there is no perceiver, then there also cannot be anything perceived. That then is the introduction into the Buddha's teaching of emptiness or groundlessness.

These four views establish what is called the *supermundane* view, or our ability to dissolve our senses of separation, of self, of ego clinging/ego grasping, and learn how to experience liberation.

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So, why do we have a hard time directly perceiving these supermundane views that I just talked about? The reason for that is that view, in general, is obstructed. Something is in the way of us perceiving ourselves, other people, and the world around us clearly. The obstruction in the way of clear seeing is what is called the two veils, two kinds of obstructions or obscurations you can say, that are making it difficult for us to perceive ourselves or the world clearly.

The first of these veils is called the veil of knowledge. It refers to beliefs or understandings we hold about our experiences that are simply inaccurate. Even though they are inaccurate, we believe them to be accurate. It is not simply not knowing something. It is actually knowing something wrong, believing it to be true, and therefore holding wrong knowledge and being obscured by that erroneous knowledge.

The second veil is called the veil of emotion. It is based on the wrong knowledge we have about the world. We're constantly experiencing emotions. These emotions arise because of our understanding about ourselves and others, situations, and phenomena. Because of that limited understanding, we're always in a state of duality. We're always in a state of tension or conflict. We're constantly having to figure out what is the right relationship between ourselves and others, and between ourselves and situations. There is a fundamental tension in that kind of dualistic, assessing mind. That gives rise to emotions, attachment, aversion, comparison and jealousy, arrogance and pride and conceitedness, and a great deal of confusion. All those emotions comprise what is called the veil of emotions.

The veil of knowledge and the veils of emotions make it difficult for us to emancipate our view and evolve our view until we arrive at a clear seeing of reality, a clear seeing of the suchness of things.

So, how do we remove these veils that obscure the true view? We have to engage in a practice that exposes our veils and allows us to free ourselves from these veils, to dissolve them. When we listen, reflect, and study on the meaning of the teaching, that is one way by which we eliminate erroneous knowledge from our mind and allow it to dissolve. And when we meditate and contemplate positive qualities, such as love and compassion, then we dissolve emotional states and allow our mind to come to rest and to come to stability and to come to peace. So, in

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the process of dharma practice, we are dissolving the two kinds of veils and we are evolving our view of the nature of reality.

We speak of three different aspects of the practice: the ground, which is our understanding of who we are; the path, which is our understanding of what we do; and the fruition, which is our understanding of who we are becoming. In that sense, then, applying the process of the purification of the two kinds of veils emancipates our view according to a different understanding of the nature of the perceiver and the perceived. Applying that to the ground, who we believe we are; the path, what it is we believe we need to do; and the fruition, who we believe we will become—that is the practice of view.

Next week, we're going to talk about meditation and how we can develop our meditation to lead us closer to the result of the path.